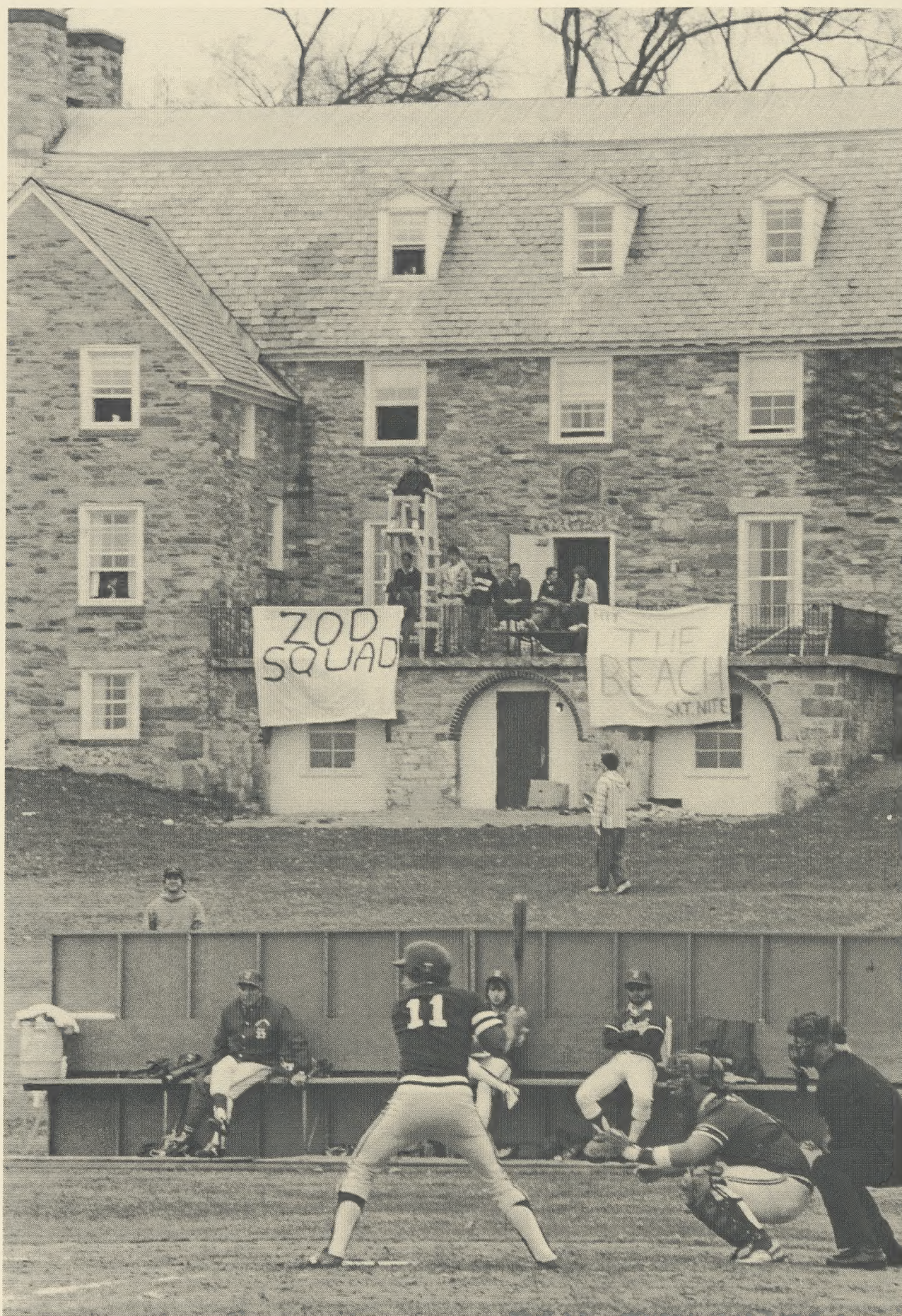


Socko, Ike, Pickerel, . . .
Hammer, Diz, Smitty, and Friends:

**A Celebration of a Century and
a Half of Middlebury Baseball**



by Karl Lindholm '67
April 21, 2006



Take me out to the ballgame: the porch of the frat house was a good place to watch a Panther game on the diamond at Porter Field Road, on the site of the present parking lot for the Center for the Arts—or a good way to advertise a “Beach Party.”

Baseball in America goes way back. The game was popular early in the 19th century—and for 100 years after the Civil War it enjoyed an unrivalled prominence in our leisure and recreation. In 1859, the first intercollegiate baseball game was played, by two NESCAC schools, Williams and Amherst, with the Lord Jeffs prevailing, 74–37.

Northern New England, Vermont, has never been regarded as a paradise in the spring for baseball, especially as the academic year has contracted in recent decades. Yet the lure of the national pastime in schools has been strong in the chilly Northeast, as elsewhere. The collegiate game has thrived here in the region of its birthplace.

The first baseball activity on the Middlebury College campus, recorded in the town newspaper, the *Middlebury Register*, was in 1866. In April 1867, the “Middlebury College Club” played a game “on the College grounds” against a combined team from the Fearnoughts and Wide-Awake clubs and defeated them, 47–38. By 1873, the college yearbook, the *Kaleidoscope*, was describing a highly organized structure of intramural base ball competition (the words “base” and “ball” were separated until the early 1900s) with all four classes having teams.

In 1876, the College newspaper, the *Undergraduate*, in its first year of publication, described the baseball scene thus: “Again base ball has become ‘the rage,’ and each pleasant day the campus resounds with the hearty shouts of its lovers+–.” By the early 1880s, Middlebury had a vigorous extramural competitive schedule, featuring games with rival in-state colleges, Norwich and UVM.

The first diamond at Middlebury, the setting for all this action, was located on the west side of Old Chapel. Here the earliest teams practiced and played their contests. On this diamond in the center of campus, Middlebury’s greatest baseball player, Ray Fisher ’10, put his charges through their motions as the school’s first professional coach and Athletic Director.

In the 19-teens, a new diamond was built on Porter Field Road, hard by the football stadium, behind the Sig Ep and Chi Psi fraternities, on the present site of the parking lot of the Center for the Arts. Middlebury games were played at that site for the next eighty years. The baseball team shared its outfield with the lacrosse team, and many a day, Wendy Forbes, Middlebury baseball coach in the 60s and 70s, could be heard to shout, “Get those Indians outta my outfield!”

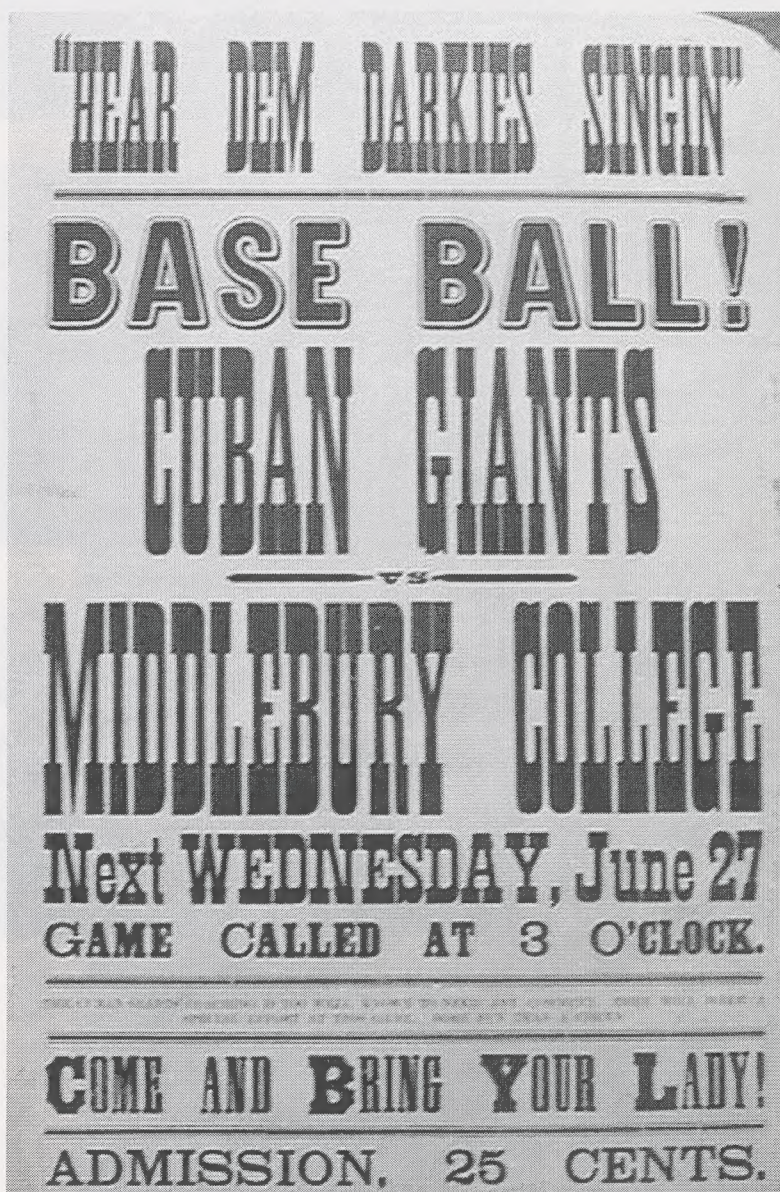


The first Middlebury baseball diamond was in the shadow of Old Chapel just west of Old Stone Row (Painter, Old Chapel, Starr). Here the first games were played after the Civil War and a College team was organized. The photo above (top) is of a contest in the 1890s.

In 1990, the College built the present field east of campus on South Street with a beautiful view of the Green Mountains, a baseball park that former Red Sox pitcher Bill Lee has called the “best in Vermont.” It has often been the case in recent years that away games have become home games, as other teams’ fields have been unplayable when the Panther diamond was dry and ready for action.

What follows herein is not so much a history of Middlebury baseball, comprehensive and chronological, but rather a selective, informal, and anecdotal approach to Middlebury baseball, a highlight reel, stories of note and moment from a century and a half of the great national game at Middlebury.

The Cuban Giants Come to Middlebury



This broadside (poster) advertises in the racist terms of the day the game between the College team and the first black professional team, the Cuban Giants. Baseball was segregated in the late 1880s, and many of the finest black players of the day barnstormed with this crack outfit. This broadside is part of a collection from The Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury.

In the 1890s, some of the greatest professional baseball talents in the land came to play at Middlebury. They were not the usual suspects, Ed Delahanty, Jimmy Collins, King Kelley, or other major leaguer stars, but rather they bore the names Frankie Grant, George Washington “Big George” Stovey, Sol White, and brothers Oscar and Andy Jackson.

They played on the first *black* professional team, the Cuban Giants, and barnstormed their way throughout the East Coast, making a living in the game the best they could. On at least three occasions, 1893, 1894, and 1898, the Giants barnstormed through Vermont and played the Middlebury nine, winning all three games.

Most baseball fans know by now that Jackie Robinson was *not* the first African-American to play major league baseball. That distinction belongs to Moses Fleetwood Walker, an Oberlin man, who played in 1884 for Toledo of the American Association, then a major league.

In the 1880s, it was not uncommon for black players to compete alongside whites on integrated teams at the highest levels, albeit unharmoniously. The symbolic moment of baseball’s segregation was June 14, 1887, when the game’s most renowned player, Adrian “Cap” Anson, spied George Stovey on the mound for Newark and uttered his famous imprecation: “Get that nigger off the field!” and baseball’s apartheid was begun.



This Middlebury team from 1893 took on the Cuban Giants before a crowd of 400 fans, and lost 17-8.

After Anson's boycott, Stovey joined the Cuban Giants, the pre-eminent black team of the era, though nobody on that team was actually Cuban.

Joining Stovey on the Giants in the 1890s was Frankie Grant, perhaps the best player, white or black, of the 1880s, and Sol White. Grant, who was born in Pittsfield, Mass and raised in Williamstown, led the International League in hitting in 1886 with a .366 average, still a record. Grant is one of 17 Negro leaguers recently elected to baseball's Hall of Fame.

Another original Cuban Giant, Sol White, was a player, manager, and historian of the game. His 1907 *History of Colored Baseball*, which survives and has been reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press, is the source of much of what we know of early black baseball. He too was selected in February, 2006, for induction into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

On May 9, 1893, the Cuban Giants, with both Grant and Stovey, came to Vermont to play the college boys of Middlebury.

A big crowd of over 400 fans (College enrollment was only 85) turned out for the contest, according to the *Middlebury Undergraduate*, the school newspaper. It wasn't much of a game: "The visitors . . . piled up nine scores in the first inning," and cruised to a 17-8 victory.

The *Undergraduate* noted the "fine playing" of the shortstop and clean-up hitter, who of course was Frankie Grant. Stovey batted fifth and played right field and scored three runs. "The only pleasing feature of the game," reported the newspaper, "was the coaching of the Giants."

This reference was undoubtedly to entertainment provided during the game by players manning the coaching boxes. Clowning, putting on a show, often affecting crude racial stereotypes, was an important aspect of the Cubans' appeal, and indeed for black teams throughout the next half-century, as a way to lure white fans to these contests.

The Giants returned the following year and defeated the college boys, *twice*, in the first game (11-4) and the last game (14-8) of the season. The Middlebury team won all its other games in 1894, all five of them. After the first game with the Giants, the *Undergraduate* enthused, "although the college was beaten, all were pleased by the game the boys played."

In 1898 the Giants returned. Despite the fact that Coach "Stick" Aldrich of Vergennes had the Middlebury team doing "fast and clean work," The Giants again dominated, 17-7.

Imagine. Some of the greatest players of the day here at Middlebury playing the College boys in the shadow of Old Chapel.

Waite! Waite Hoyt was the finest player ever to attend Middlebury, but he was here for only a semester in 1918 and never played on the team. He was the best pitcher on the great '27 Yankees of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, winning 22 games and losing 7. He was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame in 1969.



Ray Fisher and "Ike" Hulihan: Middlebury's Major Leaguers

Who was the best baseball player ever to represent Middlebury College? Well, we should probably start with our major leaguers—Ray Fisher and Harry "Ike" Hulihan?

Wait. Or rather "Waite!"

Without question, the best player ever to attend Middlebury was Hall of Fame pitcher Waite Hoyt, who won 237 games in the Big Leagues as the ace of the great Yankee teams of Ruth and Gehrig in the 1920s, broadcast the game for 24 years for the Cincinnati Reds after retiring from action, and was elected to the Cooperstown shrine in 1969.

But that's a trick answer. Hoyt was only at Middlebury for a few months in the fall of 1918 as part of a short-term military program, the SATC (Students Army Training Corps). He took a few courses (didn't do very well) and never actually suited up for the Panther nine. He did play football. The war ended that fall, and Hoyt, who had already pitched in the major leagues for John McGraw's Giants as an 18 year old in the summer of 1918, never returned to Middlebury after Christmas break.

So Waite Hoyt doesn't count.

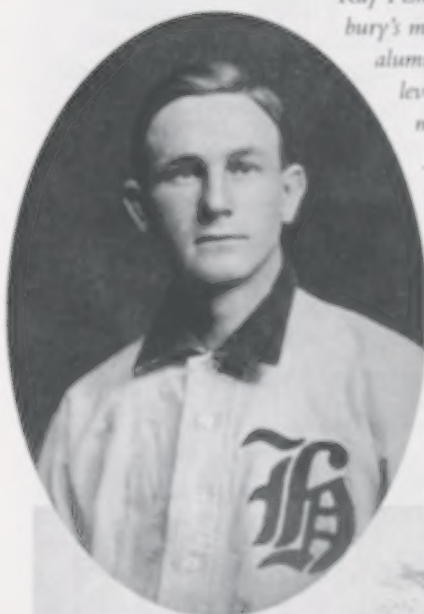
Ray Fisher, on the other hand, graduated from Middlebury in 1910 and was a fine major league pitcher for New York (AL) and Cincinnati (NL) for ten years, winning an even 100 games in the big leagues.

In 1919, he was 14-5 for Cincinnati and started Game Three of the World Series, the infamous Black Sox Series. This was the game Comiskey's White Sox didn't throw and little Dickie Kerr bested Fisher, 3-0, in a pitcher's duel.

Fisher was born and raised on a farm in Middlebury and graduated from Middlebury High School before enrolling in the local college. At college, he acquired the nickname "Pickerel" or "Pick" for short, a play on his name.

Fisher's performance for Middlebury College was spectacular but limited to only two seasons. In his freshman year, the Panther team was 4-5, with Fisher winning all four games, three of which were shutouts. He struck out 18 Colgate batters and 17 Norwich Cadets.

Ray Fisher ('10) is Middlebury's most illustrious baseball alumnus, playing at a high level for ten years in the majors, then coaching for 37 years at the University of Michigan, winning 661 games. He was also the Middlebury's first fulltime coach and athletic director. The Middlebury baseball MVP Award is named for Fisher.





Unfortunately, Rutland's "Ike" Hulihan '23 (third from the left, no hat) hurt his arm pitching too many innings in the chilly Vermont air and only played a short time in the majors. He had "Tommy John" surgery

before Tommy John was born. He is reputed to have struck out 24 Fordham batters in a game.

In his sophomore year, he was just as dominating, so he made the decision after that season to find better competition. Fisher pursued a professional career in the summers of 1908 and '09 and returned to the College in the fall to serve as Athletic Director and earn his degree. His nickname in pro baseball was "the Vermont Schoolmaster." He remained attached to Vermont for his entire life, returning in the summers to his camp on Lake Champlain and to manage teams in the Northern League in the 1940s and 50s.

Fisher was also famous for his "scandal." By 1921, he had tired of the ill-paying, unstable life of a professional ballplayer and accepted a job as head baseball coach at the University of Michigan, a decision which annoyed autocratic Baseball Commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Landis ruled that Fisher had failed to give Cincinnati sufficient notice and placed him on the "restricted list," which constituted a ban for life from major league play.

Fisher went on to lead Michigan baseball for 37 years. His teams won 661 games (and lost 292), 15 Big Ten Championships, and a national championship in 1953. The baseball field at Michigan is Ray Fisher Stadium. In 1980, when Fisher was 93, the ban was lifted by Major League Baseball and he was reinstated by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn.

By any standard, Ray Fisher enjoyed an extraordinary career in baseball. Since 1997, the Athletic Department has awarded the Ray Fisher trophy to the best Middlebury baseball player.

By contrast, Harry "Ike" Hulihan only enjoyed the proverbial "cup o' coffee" in the majors, winning two games and losing three for the Braves in 1924. By the

time he showed up in Boston, he had wrecked his arm playing in the chilly Vermont spring air and throwing too many pitches for weak Middlebury teams in the early 1920s. Hulihan starred for the Panthers for all four years, but at a lower flame than Ray Fisher.

Ike Hulihan was a big man on campus at Middlebury. He also played football and basketball and, according to the yearbook, was known for his coolness under fire in any situation: "He is at home before an 'angry mob' on the sidelines, in any classroom and at any Women's Dormitory."

Unlike Fisher, Hulihan's record on the diamond was not perfect. He was often victimized by his teammates' inadequacies. He was 0-5 against the University of Vermont. His talent, however, was indisputable. Though no box score exists, he is reported to have struck out 24 batters against Fordham.

After his one summer in the majors, he underwent what came to be known as "Tommy John" surgery (rare in that era), was forced to give up baseball, and got on with his adult life, most of which was spent in business in New York City.

If Fisher is Middlebury's best in these early years, Hulihan was very good. In the Fisher-Hulihan years combined, the Middlebury nine produced a record of 28 wins against 37 losses: Fisher and Hulihan accounted for 24 of those 28 wins!

So, if anyone ever asks you if any Middlebury College students ever made it to the major leagues, tell them about the great Ray Fisher, and the near-great Harry "Ike" Hulihan.

Middlebury's Moonlight Graham: "Socko" Wurm

In the novel *Shoeless Joe* by W.P. Kinsella, and the movie adapted from it, *Field of Dreams*, Archibald "Moonlight" Graham is celebrated for the modesty of his major league statistics. He played one inning of one game in 1918 for John McGraw's New York Giants in right field—and never touched the ball or got to bat.

Move over, Moonlight, you've got nothing on Frank "Socko" Wurm, Middlebury, class of 1950.

A lefty pitcher, Socko played in just one major league game, pitching one-third of an inning. He started the second game of a Labor Day doubleheader, September 4, 1944, in Boston for the Brooklyn Dodgers, who were on their way to a seventh place finish with a record of 63 wins and 91 losses.

It was not an auspicious debut. Twenty-year old Wurm faced only seven batters, walking five, giving up a double and four runs (he did strike out the other hitter he faced). His earned run average for all time would be 36.00. *The New York Times* described the performance as "lamentable."

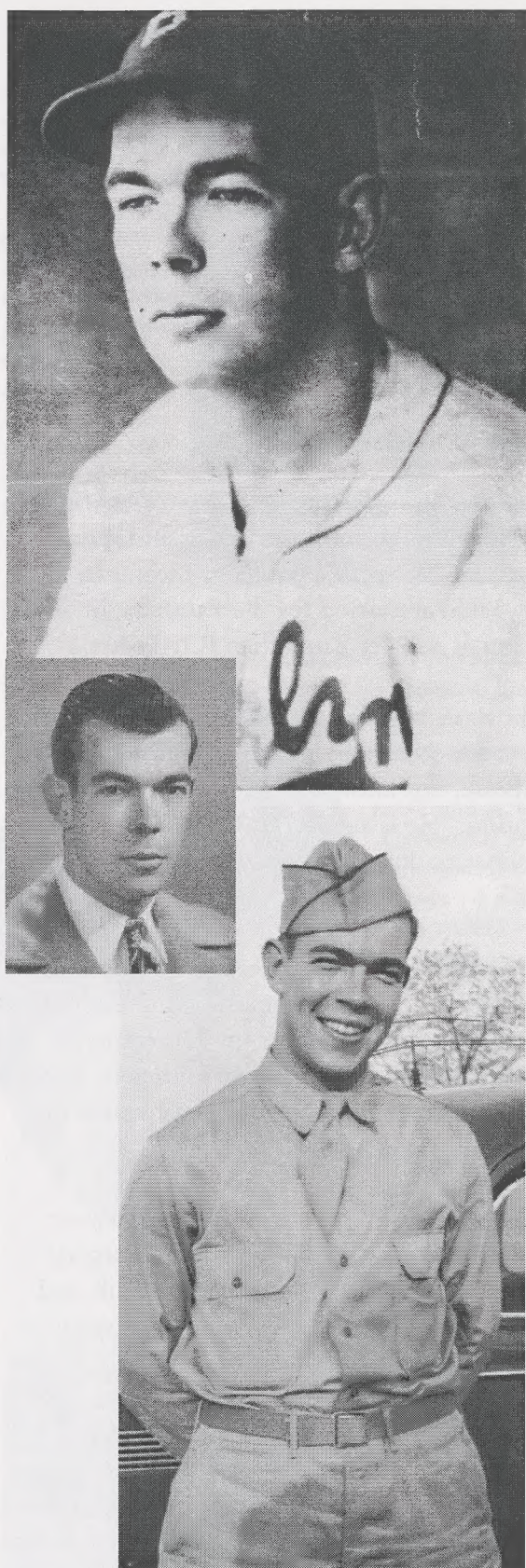
For years, we have believed that Middlebury College had among its alumni but two major league baseball players, the estimable Fisher and Hulihan. We can add the name of Frank Wurm.

Wurm never played baseball for the Panthers: he couldn't. . . he was a pro. He arrived on campus in 1945, as part of the influx of veterans returning from the war to attend college on the G.I. Bill.

Socko (the nickname was acquired early in his life) was signed to a professional contract at age 16 while in high school at Washington Academy in Salem, New York in 1940. A 6'1", 175-pound lefty, he attracted the attention of Dodger scouts by throwing four no-hitters in high school.

Minor League statistics are hard to come by, but clearly Socko Wurm was a prospect, winning eight games and losing one for Olean of the "B" League in 1942 and earning a promotion to Montreal, the Dodgers' top farm team.

As it did for so many players in the 1940s, service in the military interrupted his promising career. He was inducted into the Army in February, 1943, just before his 19th birthday, and assigned to the 155th Field Artillery Battalion.



Frank "Socko" Wurm '50 couldn't play for the Middlebury nine because he was a professional ballplayer, appearing in one inning of one game for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1944. He served in combat on the Italian front in World War II and came to Middlebury as part of the great influx of veterans attending college on the GI Bill.

He served in combat on the “Cassino front” in Italy, and spent two months in an Army hospital in Salerno for a “severely sprained back,” sustained when he allowed a 100 millimeter shell to fall on him rather than to the ground, possibly to explode. He also was hospitalized for “frontline shock.”

Socko Wurm was discharged in July, 1944 and resumed his baseball career. In 1945, he went to Spring Training with the Dodgers and split time between Montreal and Newport News of the Piedmont (Class B League) where he won two games and lost three. He also developed arm trouble from which he never fully recovered.

Wurm was also quite a musician, a drummer. His roommate, Ed Kania recalled that “he used to open up all the windows to his room and practice away,” Kania would join him when he went home on weekends to Cambridge (NY) to play in his mother’s band, “Bess Wurm and the Night Crawlers.” His dad was the Chief of Police.

Wurm dropped out of college in the spring of 1946 to rejoin the Dodgers in the spring training and was assigned to Montreal with Robinson, but was out of baseball after that season.

Many of the veterans at Middlebury in these immediate post-war years, including Wurm, lived off-campus, “filling every spare room in town and overflowing to the Dog Team Tavern” (according the 1949 yearbook). He dated a local girl, Reajeanne Bourdon, whom he married in August, 1950, after graduating from Middlebury with a degree in physical education.

Most of Wurm’s adult life was spent back in the Glens Falls area where he had grown up and starred in baseball. He sold insurance for a time, and taught school in the Fort Edward system. In time, he got back into baseball as an “area scout” for the Dodgers and Pirates. In that role, he signed Dave Lapointe of Glens Falls, who enjoyed a 17-year major league career.

His only child, a daughter Kristin, was born in 1974 when he was 50 years old and in his third marriage. Though he and her mother divorced, “he lived right around the corner,” Kristin says.

Frank Wurm died in 1993. Kristin, a school psychologist in Fort Ann (NY), became the custodian of his boxes of Middlebury and baseball memorabilia. “He always loved baseball and celebrated each year the anniversary of his major league game.”



1949 Middlebury Baseball team: Loaded with veterans, this Middlebury nine, under Coach Dick Ciccolella, had to be among the very best ever. Seven players from this team signed professional baseball contracts: Wendy Forbes (seated, 3rd from left), Paul Farrell, (seated, 4th from left); John Corbisiero, (middle, behind bat boy); Jack Mulcahy (standing, 2nd from left), Jim Newman (standing, middle, behind “Johnny Corbs”), Dick Shea (standing, 3rd from right), Walt Maurer (standing, 2nd from right).

Home from the War: Middlebury's Glory Years

For its first 80 Years, Middlebury College was a men's school. During World War II, it was a school for women, mostly. In 1943, for example, there were 74 men enrolled at Middlebury and nearly 500 women.

Then the boys came home.

Armed now with the G.I. Bill, they attacked higher education. By 1948, there were 704 men at Middlebury, 85% of whom were vets. They filled all the available dorm space and spilled out into the town. Having seen Paree, these boys, men really, in their mid-20s, had a good old time.

And they played sports. Did they ever play sports.

The teams at Middlebury in the late 40s and early 50s were among the best that ever wore a Middlebury "M." Intercollegiate sports were not so highly organized then—no Division I or Division III, for example. The State Series—Middlebury, Norwich, UVM, St. Michaels—was a big deal.

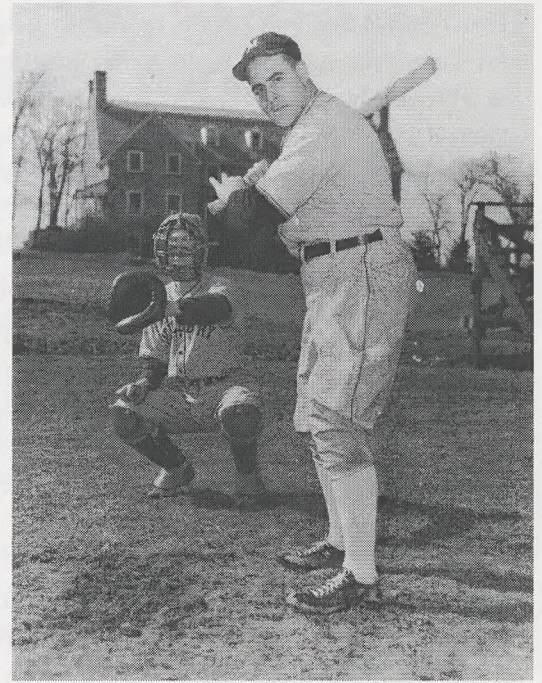
The baseball teams were extraordinary. In 1949, the team went 10–3, taking on all-comers and winning five of six State Series games. The 1950 team was just as good (10–5). For five years running, Coach Dick Cicoella's teams won the State Series.

Those baseball teams from 1949–51 had *eight* players who went on to play professionally after graduation.

Fred Neuberger '50, Director of Admissions at Middlebury for 32 years, was one of those vets and a student at Middlebury. He played on the baseball team and remembers well his talented teammates. "They were Jack Kirk's boys from Boston. After the war, Jack used to load guys up and bring them to Middlebury."

Kirk himself had been a great athlete at Middlebury and went on to become a longtime Trustee and venerated benefactor of the College.

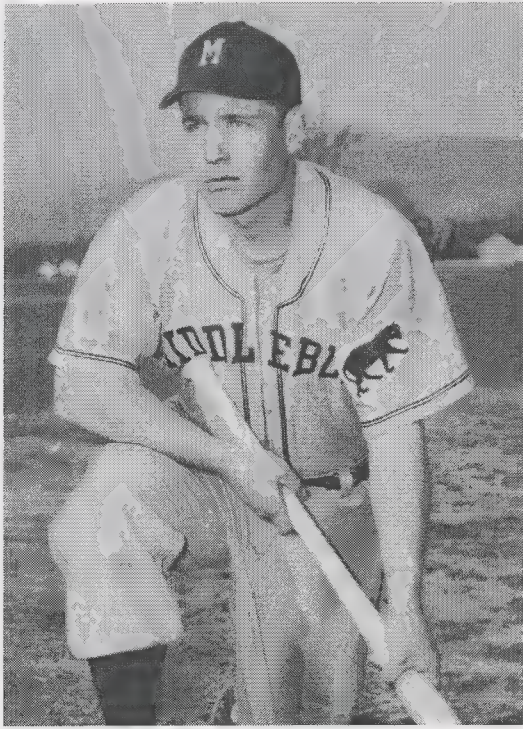
"College baseball was really big after the war," Fred recalls. "All the town people would come and watch. The team was full of colorful characters and won all the time. These guys were good; they were mammoth and fun to watch. Nothing took the place of the games against the University of Vermont. The UVM games were the best."



"Jack Kirk's Boys": Middlebury benefactor John Kirk '39 was a brilliant athlete in his undergraduate years. Later, he liked to send talented athletes this way, especially from his home town of Melrose, Mass.



Jim Newman was an ace Middlebury pitcher in the post-war years and played in the Yankee organization after college. Dean of Admissions Emeritus, Fred Neuberger '50 says he was "the best pitcher I ever saw at Middlebury."



Wendy Forbes '50 was one of Jack Kirk's Boys and among the finest athletes to play sports at Middlebury. A twelve letter man in baseball, hockey and football, he coached at Middlebury for 22 years after playing six years of baseball in the Cardinals' chain.

The infield on that 1950 team, Eddie Coppinger, Paul Mulcahy, Wendy Forbes, and Paul Farrell, were all veterans and Jack's boys. "These guys were huge," Neuberger says, "more like a football team than a baseball team."

"Mulcahy had tree trunks for legs. I remember once walking by the visitors team's dugout and I heard a guy say, 'look at that big SOB at second.'" Mulcahy played three years of minor league ball after college for the Braves.

The shortstop, Farrell, played four years of professional ball in the Phillies' farm system and might have been the best prospect on the team, according to Neuberger. "He batted lead-off and started game after game with a home run."

Wendy Forbes, the third-baseman, was one of the greatest athletes ever to attend the college, earning twelve varsity letters in football, hockey, and baseball. He played four years of baseball in the Cardinals' organization before embarking on the coaching career that brought him back to his alma mater for 22 years.

The catcher was "Johnny Corbs," John Corbisiero, who had been a bruising fullback on wartime football teams at Notre Dame. "When he blocked the plate," Neuberger says, "it stayed blocked." Corbisiero briefly played both professional football (Chicago Bears) and baseball (Braves system) before joining the Air Force in the Korean War years.

Jim Newman, a pitcher on those late 40s teams, was Neuberger's roommate and closest friend. "He was the best pitcher I ever saw at Middlebury," Fred recalls. "He was a big six footer who could really wing it. He had an overhand fastball and a 'drop' that fell right off the table."

Newman signed with the Yankees in 1950 and played in Amsterdam, NY, before being drafted into the Army in 1951 for Korean War service. Upon his discharge he played two more years, in 1953 at Binghamton in the Eastern League and at Birmingham in the Southern Association in 1954.

Three outfielders on that 1950 team also saw some professional action: Walter Maurer played two seasons in the Yankee system; Dick Shea played for the Bridgeport Bees of the old Colonial League, and Bobby Stalker played three seasons in the Braves' organization.

"Deep down inside I feel that Stalker may have been the best prospect on that team," Neuberger says. "He could sure play. Six or seven scouts were at every game and most were there to see him. He was 190-200 pounds and he could run like hell. He swung a big heavy bat, left-handed, and hit the bejesus out of the ball."

"But the thing that set him apart was a major league throwing arm. He'd stand out there in the weeds in right field and throw that ball . . . it would start out nose high and you'd wonder if it was ever going to drop. It never did. I caught it a couple of times and it almost knocked me over."

What a remarkable club: eight players from one team who went on to play professional baseball.

Leo Durocher on Trial in Middlebury

The Leo Durocher story doesn't have to do with the college specifically, but it's fun anyway, so here it is.

A feisty Frenchman from West Springfield, Mass, Durocher was a hero of baseball's integration as the manager and defender of Jackie Robinson and the mentor of Willie Mays. Durocher managed some great Dodger teams in the late 1940s—and then was the Giants leader in 1951 when Bobby Thomson hit “the shot heard round the world” to defeat the Dodgers in a playoff series.

As a manager, he was descended from the legendary John J. “Muggsy” McGraw, undersized, pugnacious, profane, obsessively competitive. He coined the phrase, “Nice guys finish last” and came by his nickname “Leo the Lip” naturally.

Off the field, Durocher loved the fast life and ran with the Rat Pack of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. in Las Vegas and L.A. He also loved the ladies, and this passion brought him to Middlebury, Vermont, where he got into hot water.

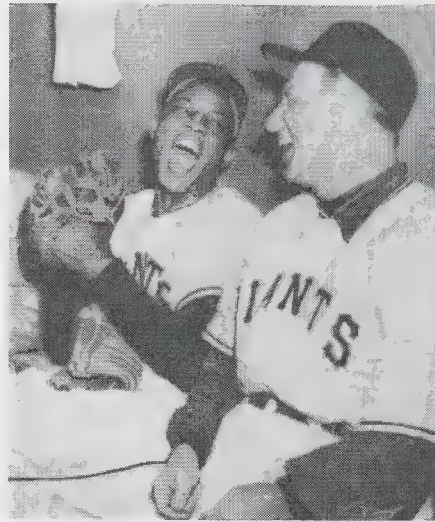
In the early 1960s, after Leo divorced his third wife, actress Lorraine Day, his main squeeze was an attractive young Middlebury woman, Carolyn Morin, over 30 years younger.

Rumor had it that Durocher was also romancing her mother, Anna.

This of course didn't sit well with another feisty Franco-American, the father-husband, René, a mason, who brought suit against Leo the Lip for “alienation of affection” in the summer of 1964 when the 58 year-old Durocher was the third base coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The “Durocher incident” drew national attention to Middlebury.

Durocher had come to Middlebury in January of 1964 to speak at the American Legion “Sports Night,” where he regaled the 175 in attendance with stories from his 30 years in baseball.



The recollections of Middlebury of Leo Durocher (here with his protégé, Willie Mays) were probably not altogether pleasant. He was sued in 1964 for “alienation of affection” and came back to town for five days in the middle of the baseball season to defend himself against that charge.

After his speech, he was confronted in his room at the Middlebury Inn with a “civil arrest warrant” by the County Sheriff. He was released the next morning when three prominent Middlebury citizens posted his bail of \$30,000, after procuring a loan from the National Bank of Middlebury.

Durocher called the suit “ridiculous” and “asinine” and declared “war.” Settling was out of the question, so he returned to Middlebury in July, in the middle of the baseball season, to have the matter resolved in court.

Durocher declared on the stand that he was “very much in love” with Carolyn Morin, whom he was actively “courting.” The 26-year-old Carolyn, described in the *Independent* as a “willowy brunette,” was a “model and TV actress” who had also served as Durocher’s “secretary.”

His relationship to her mother, Durocher contended, was purely the result of his interest in Carolyn, though he acknowledged that he bought Anna Morin expensive gifts and paid her travel expenses and hotel lodging for trips to California and Las Vegas.

The trial took five days from beginning to end, providing the town with uncommon excitement. The jury of six men and six women took but two hours to return a verdict of not guilty. With that, “Leo the Lip” said good-bye to our tiny burg and headed back to California.

As Walter Cronkite said on his CBS newscast, “Durocher was in love with the bricklayer’s daughter, not, as charged, with the bricklayer’s wife.”

The "Modern Era": Smitty's Minions

The 1960s and 70s, the Vietnam Era and its aftermath, were not great times for institutions and sports; nonetheless, there were, inevitably, good players wearing the Middlebury raiment, and exciting contests played on the ball yard on Porter Field Road.

In the mid sixties, crafty pitchers Newt Baker and Lefty Tom Clark, both Vermonters, led the Panther teams of Coach Wendy Forbes (1963-84) to winning seasons in '63 and '65 respectively. Hockey star Wayne Halliwell '66 and second baseman Dale Smith '67 were particularly tough outs at the plate.

Baker was primarily a knuckleball pitcher. His catcher, Jeff McKay '65, reports, "He had a *great* knuckler and a very good curve ball. He was 'nasty.' He would win today." Baker struck out 18 Lowell Tech in May 1964.

Wendy had another outstanding pitcher in the late 70s, also a Vermonter, Greg Birsky '79, who was also a terrific basketball player. Birsky holds the school record for career ERA at 1.79 and is tied with A.J. Husband '99 (another Vermonter!) for most wins in a season with seven in 1977, when his team went 11-5.

Dale Smith was the captain of the '67 team and the best player on teams from '65 to '67. Twenty-seven years later, Dale's son Brad followed in his footsteps, captaining the '95 team, providing solid play at the plate and in the field at shortstop, as well as inspired leadership for Coach Bob Smith.

Now in his 21st year as Baseball Coach, Smitty has given the program genuine stability, overseeing its progress to the point where it is now competitive with the traditional small college powers in the Northeast. He introduced an intense Spring Break trip to Florida and, most recently, to Arizona (11 games in eight days), expanded the schedule from 10-20 games a season to the present 25-35, and guided the team to 20 wins in 1999 and the team's only post-season appearance, in the ECAC Tournament that same year.

Over his twenty-one years, Coach Smith ("Smitty" to all) has benefited from able assistants, Bill Mandigo for eight years and later Bill's brother, Doug Mandigo '97, also a fine player for Smitty. Brian Hamm, the captain of the 2003 team served as baseball assistant for three years while he worked in the Admissions Office. Local Coach Bill Higman has worked



Newt Baker '64 was the best pitcher at Middlebury in the 1960s. He baffled hitters with his knuckler and curve and struck out 18 Lowell Tech and the rest of the team in a 1-0 win.



Baseball Coach at Middlebury since 1986, Bob Smith, right, looks out over the action on the new college field (opened in 1990) with Jeff McKay '65, who has coached the team for many years. In his 21 years at the helm, Smitty has coached the Panthers to over 200 wins.



Captain Smitty: Dale Smith '67 was an outstanding player at Lowell in his year at Middlebury and captained the '67 team. 28 years later he was, once again, Smitty, and captain of the '97 team.



Windy Forbes sits on the bench with an umpire between games, perhaps discussing their favorite fishing holes.

with Panther pitchers since 1996, and in recent years, Jeff McKay, captain of the 1965 Middlebury team and an experienced coach in his own right, has returned to the campus in the spring from his California home to coach the hitters.

Hageman contends that the best pitching performance in an individual game in his years with the team was Tyler Conrad's no-hitter in 2002. Conrad, a four-year mainstay on the College nine, was nearly perfect on April 13, a gloomy Saturday in Clinton, New York, striking out eleven and walking just two in a seven-inning 6-0 win over the Hamilton College Continentals. Conrad was that Middlebury anomaly—a downhill ski racer and baseball player.

Conrad's no-hitter was the first since May 9, 1982, when Frank Burke, a junior at that time, spun a seven-inning beauty on the last day of the season, beating Plymouth State, 3-0. "It was the end of the semester, and I had been up all night writing a paper," Burke recalls. "I was so groggy, I had to ask Dick Waterman (long-time Middlebury Trainer) how many outs there were a couple of times. It was just one of those days." Burke has made baseball his life, as the President and co-owner of the Chattanooga Lookouts, the Double A franchise of the Cincinnati Reds since 1993.

For Hageman, a close second to Conrad's beauty was Chris Fraser's 2004 nine-inning one-hitter in Florida, when he defeated the mighty Ephs of Williams, 1-0. For pitching effectiveness over a whole season,

there's no match for A.J. Husband's 1999 year when he started nine games, winning seven, striking out 79 (in 65 innings), and compiling a 1.94 ERA. Husband's stellar season earned him a tryout with the Red Sox at Fenway Park, but alas, no contract.

As for hitting, it will be hard to locate in the archives a better one-season performance has to be Ryan Armstrong's 2005 season, when he was one of the top Division III hitters in the country, setting the school record with a .494 batting average. According to batting coach McKay, "Ryan is that rare combination of a fun-loving guy who really enjoys the game and a player who really works hard to become a better hitter."

In 1998, a large free-spirited fellow with the nickname "Diz," had an extraordinary year at the plate with eight homeruns and 33 RBIs. Smitty considers Davin "Diz" Wilfred (1b/dh) the "best power hitter" he has coached. Like his teammate, Husband, Wilfred had a tryout with a major league team, the Atlanta Braves, at the end of his senior year season. He leads in the career HR category with 16 and RBIs with 92 (25 more than Ethan Mark '99 in second).

The record for most hits in a career (115) belongs to John Prescott who played from 2000-03. He also holds the record for doubles with 29.



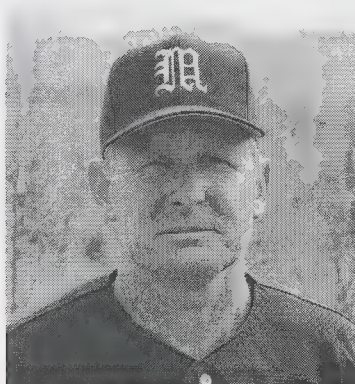
Lefty Tyler Conrad ('99-02) holds most of the Middlebury career pitching records. In 2002, he pitched a no-hitter at Hamilton College.

With the level of talent on this year's team and in recent years generally, there is a keen sense that the best is yet to come. With Armstrong in the outfield, Co-Captain Noah Walker at shortstop, two strong catchers in Andrew Pavoni and sophomore Nick Lefebvre, and strong young arms on the hill, there are many Panther diamond highlights still to be written, perhaps this year.



A.J. Husband's brilliant 1999 season earned him a tryout with the Red Sox at Fenway Park.

Smitty's All-Stars



Recently, Coach Smith reflected on his two decades at the helm and considered some of the outstanding players he has coached.

Outfielders first: "I've had three exceptional center-fielders," Smitty says.

"The best was Bill Heslam '88, who had great range, just a wealth of talent. He played in the Cape Cod League between his junior and senior years. He had a great arm and was a pretty effective pitcher." The other outfielders he cites are John Miletis '99 and his own son, Denny Smith '03, both of whom could "go get a fly and were good offensively."

Infielders: At third, Coach Smith singles out Jud Bruzgel '98 and Brian Coates '99. At short, Brian Hamm '02 ("exceptional defensively") and Brad Smith '95 ("a baseball guy through and through") were both effective

leaders and exceptional players. "Hammer" has the most career assists with 323 chances; Smith is next with 190.

At second base, Smitty identifies three solid defensive players and strong hitters: Dave Riester '05, who in just three years on the team established Middlebury career records in stolen bases (38) and triples (6), and the single season record in walks (27). Riester's career batting average was .393. Lefty hitter, Ethan Mark '99, slender but powerful, is among the career leaders in many batting categories, including hits, runs, RBIs, home runs (13) and walks. Chad Cooper '95 also earned mention as hard-hitting keystone sacker.

At first base, Smitty recognizes Alec Perkins '95 and John Dickie '00 ("Dickie was the best defensively by far—he picked up everything").

Catchers: Smitty's choices behind the plate are Jeff Milks '94 and Mark Odom '87. "Milks was so tough," Smitty said. "I remember when we took two from Trinity, down there, and in the second game when we were down a run late, I said to myself, 'we've just got



Baseball: Freshman Wilfred Wood (22) hit off the Hill (pitcher) to score from '00. Freshman Conrad (16) in '00, the second in winning a batting average in a season.



Freshman David Dyer (10) hit 19 home runs. At bottom, senior Wilfred Wood (22) hit 13 home runs and RBIs.

to get Milksie to the plate,' and sure enough, he got the hit to win the game. Those were big wins for the program."

"Odom was such a good athlete," his coach recalls. "He played all over the field, had a great arm."

Designated hitter: "We haven't had many straight dh's, guys who didn't play in the field," Smitty says. Of those whose primary talents were offensive, Wilfrid clearly stands out, along with catcher Ron Nobile who had 13 home runs in his four years and 67 RBIs. ("he certainly could hit.")

Pitchers: Among the many outstanding pitchers Smitty has coached, he puts Conrad ("ice water in his veins") and Husband at the top, but also includes Jake Pierson '95 ("a workhorse") and lefty Bruce Wimberley '88 ("easy-going guy, kept us in games") in the first rank and cites Tim Loescher '94, Doug Ginevan '92, and Ben Bedford '00 as first-rate. Pierson started 11 games in 1995 and 27 in his career, completing 17, and winning 15

The team for which Coach Smith holds a particular fondness is the 1994–95 group, led by Pierson, Loescher, Perkins, and Milks. “My first years were tough,” he says, “and this team helped us turn the corner. We scheduled better teams, and began to win some games. They were special.”

Approaching our Sesquicentennial

As Middlebury baseball approaches its sesquicentennial, it has much to celebrate. This celebration need not be just a historical recitation of seasons past and heroic performances,

for the present condition of the game at Middlebury is healthy indeed. Talented players, ambitious in the classroom and in their athletic pursuits, continue to find Middlebury a rich setting for their study and play.

Each team, each year, stocks its own store of experiences and anecdotes as players form friendships on the field and delight in the play of this magnificent game. The stories here scratch the surface of this rich vein of history, both individual and institutional. The history of Panther baseball will continue to be written in the excitement of competition, laughter among teammates, friendship, mentorship, physical exertion and exultation, and appreciation for the strategic intricacies and physical demands of this great game that has been part and parcel of the history of a great institution, Middlebury College.



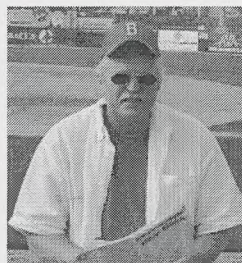
The bats are racked: The on-deck hitter awaits his turn as a Panther batter takes a pitch in a contest on the Porter Field Road diamond that served as home for Middlebury teams for most of the 20th century.



Even before he graduated, Ray Fisher was earning a salary from Middlebury College as its first Athletic Director and Coach. His nickname in professional baseball was "the Vermont Schoolmaster." He is shown here (top right in bow tie and cap) with his the players on the 1910 team, who were also his classmates, as Fisher was playing professionally in the summers between 1908-10.



Then and now...

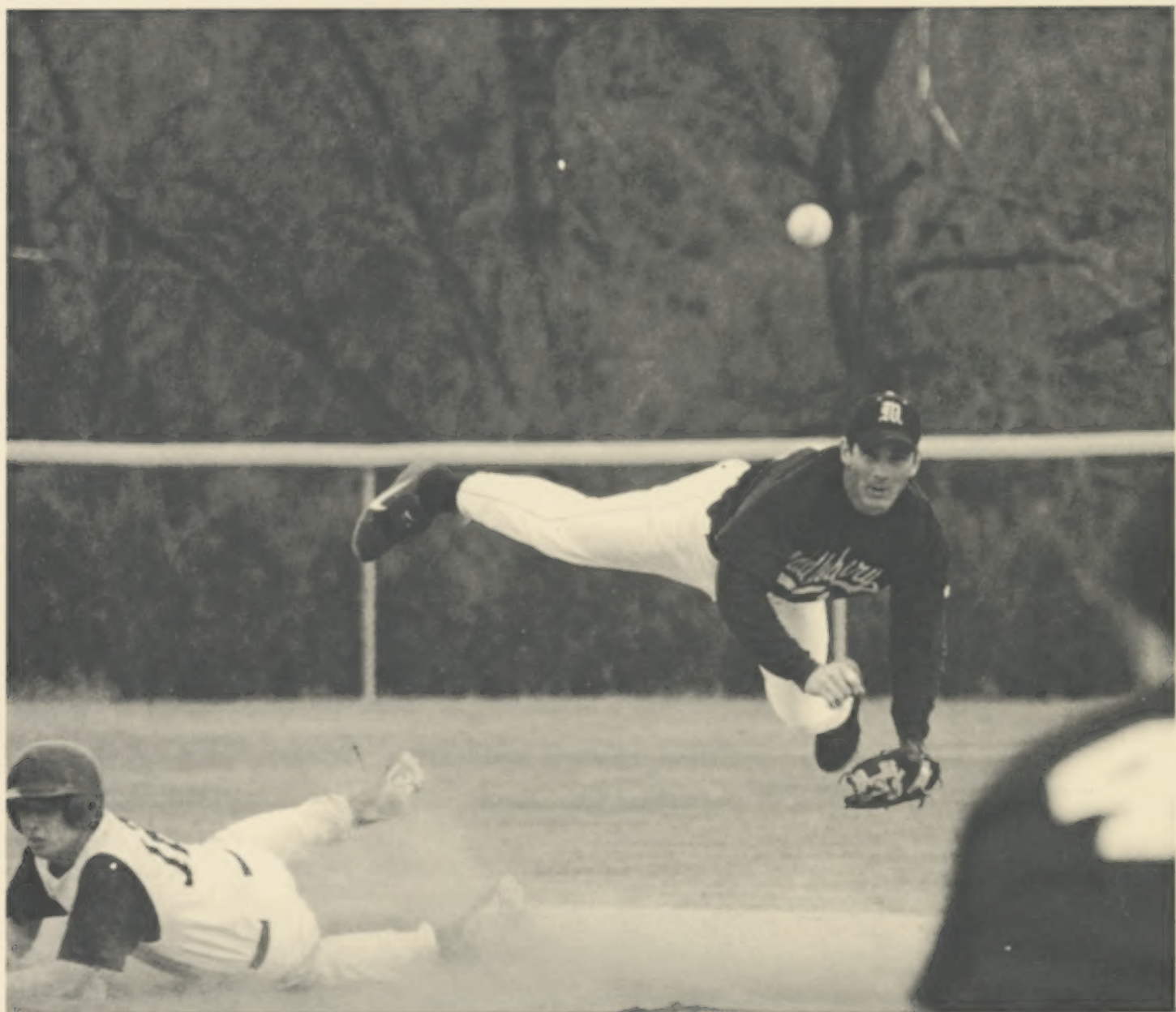


About the author:

Karl Lindholm is the Dean of Advising at Middlebury and an Assistant Professor of American Civilization. He graduated from Middlebury in 1967 and played on the baseball team in 1965 and '66. Among the courses he teaches are two baseball classes. His academic specialty is baseball's Negro leagues. He also serves as the faculty affiliate of the Middlebury baseball team and writes a sports column for the local newspaper, the Addison County Independent.



Born and raised in Middlebury, Ray Fisher '10 played ten years of major league baseball, eight years for New York (AL) and two for Cincinnati (NL), winning an even 100 games, losing 94, and compiling a 2.84 ERA. He was the starting (and losing) pitcher for Cincinnati in the third game of the 1919 World Series, a game that the White Sox did not fix. While coaching at the University of Michigan, he always returned home to Vermont for the summers, managing in the semi-pro Northern League for many years.



Hammer: Brian Hamm ('99-02) goes airborne to complete the double play against Norwich. A four-year starter at shortstop, Hamm was brilliant defensively, holding the record for most assists in a career with 326, over a hundred chances more than anyone else. He coached at Middlebury for three years after graduation and hopes to remain in the game as a college coach.



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